DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 401 276 SP 037 035

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TITLE Cohesion and Self-Disclosure Stage Development in Group Therapy Leadership Training: Potential Limitations of a Common Teaching Model.
PUB DATE [96]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Counselor Training; Group Dynamics; *Group Unity; Higher Education; *Leadership Training; *Masters Programs; *Self Disclosure (Individuals); Teaching Models; Therapists

ABSTRACT

This paper examines the development of cohesion and self-disclosure during the mandatory group experience of a masters level training program in counseling. Differences between cohesion and self-disclosure in these groups, as opposed to what might be expected in a more naturalistic setting, are described and implications for the training of group therapists are discussed. This is a descriptive study based on self-report data of individual members, 21 counseling students in a required group psychotherapy class. They were assigned to four small groups in a quasi-random fashion, attempting to have mixed-gender groups; neither age, ethnicity, nor other factors were considered in distributing group members. Groups met weekly for nine weeks. Every two weeks participants received a combined cohesion and self-disclosure questionnaire consisting of 17 items comprising a cohesion scale, a self-disclosure scale, four distractor questions, and an open-ended question. Results of this study suggest that it is probably wise to insist that leader-trainees subsequently also experience a more typical sample of in vivo group development while under supervision. A copy of the self-disclosure questionnaire is included. (Contains 18 references.) (MAH)

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ED 401 276

Cohesion and Self-Disclosure Stage Development in Group Therapy Leadership Training: Potential Limitations of a Common Teaching Model

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The development of cohesion and self-disclosure during the mandatory group experience of a masters level training program in counseling is examined. Differences between cohesion and self-disclosure in these groups, as opposed to what might be expected in a more naturalistic setting, are described and implications for the training of group therapists are discussed.

Introduction

Providing an experience as a member of a process or other training group is an integral part of most graduate programs in counseling, social work, and related fields, to provide familiarity when leading subsequent "real" therapy groups. Of major concern in this study, was the question of whether these training groups present a realistic and useful analogue of group development to the subsequent "real" groups. Previous studies of small group development have generally found increasing self-disclosure leading to increased cohesion, reciprocally leading to still more self-disclosure *ad infinitum* over the life of the group. This study indicates that there appear to be fundamental differences in the way in which these training groups respond and develop, which should be held in awareness when considering their usefulness as a teaching tool.

The relationship between cohesiveness and self-disclosure among members of small training groups of masters level counseling students was examined descriptively over the duration of a semester-long group therapy class. Using a common training model, group leaders were

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doctoral students in counseling psychology, and group members were masters students enrolled in a group therapy training course. Different units of analyses, including the individuals, the small groups, and the pooled sample of four small groups were included.

Unlike previous research with actual therapy groups, in the training groups, little relationship between self-disclosure and cohesiveness was found at any level of analysis, and neither variable changed significantly over time.

Small group research and treatment effects have been reported and reviewed in the literature for at least four decades (Kaul & Bednar, 1986). These authors report that although groups have generally been found to be effective, the basic elements for effective groups, especially the primary sources of change, remain largely unknown. One fundamental group process that has largely been supported in the literature is the construct of group cohesion, and it is one of eleven essential therapeutic factors outlined by Yalom (1985). Much support has been found for the construct of cohesion by means of factor analysis, self-report, and trained rater observations (Maxmen & Hanover, 1973; Butler & Fudriman, 1980, 1983; Long & Cope, 1980; Marcovitz & Smith, 1983; Taylor & Strasberg, 1986; Yalom, 1985). This construct has been defined as the average of the individual members' attraction to the group (Roark & Sharah, 1989), as the degree to which members, therapists, and group activities have reinforcing value for the members, or as belonging to and being accepted by a group (Yalom, 1985). All definitions, although vague, emphasize the clustering effect of group members, and all authors suggest that cohesiveness is "a necessary precondition for effective therapy" (Yalom, 1985, p50).

Another line of small group research has found evidence documenting the development of cohesion by studying group interactions over the lifetime of the group. Using content analysis and behavioral frequency counts, Lundgren and Knight (1978) have shown groups to pass or cycle through developmental stages. One of these stages is focused around a group cohesion construct which again is thought to be an essential stage of a group's development prior to the production of meaningful work (Yalom, 1985). Corey (1990) states that "cohesion occurs when people open up and take risks" and without this groupness or belongingness "members become frozen behind their defenses, and their work is of necessity superficial" (p117). Researchers have focused on several constructs that appear to be associated with the formation of cohesion in groups, particularly self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, generally defined as the sharing of ideas, feelings and experiences for the benefit of the members, "is not considered an end in itself, it is a means by which open communication can occur within a group" (Corey, 1990, p123).

It has been shown, through content analysis, self-report and unobtrusive measures of small groups, that members self-disclose when a group cohesion stage has been formed (Johnson & Ridener, 1974; Kirshner, Dies & Brown, 1978). Others have also found that increasing self-disclosure then leads to subsequent higher levels of group cohesiveness (Stokes, Fueher & Childs, 1983), and these phenomena clearly appear to be reciprocal in nature.

Ribner (1974) found students given specific contracts to self-disclose in a group setting formed more cohesive groups. Elias, Johnson, and Fortman (1989), looking at self-disclosure behavior in student small-task groups, found that high self-disclosure led to significantly more group cohesiveness and greater commitment to the task. In another study, Roark and Sharah (1989) found that group cohesiveness in personal growth groups was highly correlated with self-disclosure.

In all of the studies reviewed, the groups examined had either a common focal goal,

problem or other similar reason for existence. The members had a real and significant stake in maximizing the effects of the group process as presented by the group leaders. Training groups such as those examined in this study, while attempting to replicate the experience of "real" groups, are different in significant ways. They are clearly analogues, and there is little incentive to take the risks often associated with "actual" group process. Additionally they are most often limited to a semester's duration, a very brief time for significant development to occur.

The purpose of the present study was to trace the developmental patterns of cohesion and self-disclosure in these training groups to see if they responded as might be expected from classic models of group development. Specifically, we examined the overall group effects of cohesion and self-disclosure on each other. Based on prior research, if these training groups were representative and accurate analogues of typical therapy groups, it would be expected that the students would increase self-disclosure and feelings of cohesion in a reciprocal manner over the lifetime of the groups.

Method

Design:

This is a descriptive study based on self-report data of individual members. The study examines relationships between cohesion and self-disclosure scales for individuals, groups, and for the complete pooled data set.

Group Members:

Twenty-one (14 female & 7 male) counseling masters students enrolled in a required group psychotherapy class participated as subjects in this study. All participants were required to attend these groups to satisfy course requirements, however, participation in the research was voluntary and one student declined to participate.

These students were assigned to 4 small groups in a quasi-random fashion, attempting to have mixed-gender groups. Neither age, ethnicity, nor other factors were considered in distributing group members.

Group Leaders:

Nine (6 female & 3 male) students enrolled in a doctoral level group psychotherapy seminar were assigned as leaders to the 4 small groups of masters students.

Group Composition:

Group 1: consisted of 2 leaders (2 female) and 5 members (3 female and 2 male).

Group 2: consisted of 2 leaders (2 female) and 5 members (4 female and 1 male).

Group 3: consisted of 2 leaders (1 female & 1 male) and 5 members (3 female and 2 male). One member of this group declined to complete the research questionnaires.

Group 4: consisted of 3 leaders (2 male and 1 female) and 7 members (5 female and 2 male).

Leader Training:

Leaders had a six week training course on group leadership skills based on the principles of running a group as described by Yalom (1985). All leaders read and discussed this work prior

to initiating the groups, and ran the groups based on these principles. No measures of the level of leadership skill were taken, but leaders met with a professor for group supervision twice weekly throughout the sessions to assure consistency.

Procedure:

Groups met weekly for 9 weeks; each session lasting 1 1/2 hours. A combined cohesion and self-disclosure questionnaire was administered to group members at the end of sessions two, four, six, and eight. Group participants each chose a number to attach to their questionnaires so that data could be tracked individually. Group members' responses were not disclosed to other members of the groups, and they did not know the purpose of the research. Researchers did not know the identity of the individual responses, and leaders were kept blind to the results of the questionnaires for the duration of the study.

It was felt that if cohesion and self-disclosure were significantly related factors in this setting, then a broad and simple scale should detect these effects. It was hoped that individual responses to group trends as well as overall group trends themselves would be detected.

Measures:

The questionnaire consisted of 17 items comprising a cohesion scale, a self-disclosure scale, four distracter questions, and a final open-ended question. Members rated their answers to each closed-ended question on a five point Likert scale which was randomly reversed throughout the questionnaire to avoid a response bias. One open-ended question was used at the end to gather information about critical incidents in the group.
(See Figure 6 for complete scale.)

Cohesion was measured by a modified version of the Cohesion Scale reported in Yalom (1985, p54). Six questions were chosen from this scale which were thought to capture the essence of the construct. Examples include: "Compared to other groups, I imagine that my group works well together" and "I would like to replace several members".

Self-disclosure was measured by six questions which were taken from the literature to measure this construct (Gruen, 1965; Taylor & Altman, 1966). Examples include: "I revealed a great deal about myself in the group" and "I told the group something that I had not planned to tell them".

Four irrelevant distracter questions were randomly distributed, dealing with general group issues not connected to self-disclosure or cohesion. Some examples include: "The facilitators seem well qualified" and "I would pay to be in this group".

A final open-ended question asked: "Was there something in the group today that helped or hindered you?"

Analysis:

1) Cohesion and self-disclosure scales were correlated to see if a relationship exists between these constructs for individuals, groups, and for the complete data set. Graphs show trends over time found at each unit size of measurement, and individual and group averages were compared descriptively.

2) Answers to the open ended question were examined to identify trends or patterns

among individuals. It was thought that individuals might provide information about what they felt was happening in their group, especially in reference to cohesion and self-disclosure.

Results

For the complete data set, no significant overall correlation was found between self-disclosure and cohesion (R2 = .16). Among the individual small groups, two were found to display high associations between self-disclosure and cohesion (Group 2: R2 = .84, Group 3: R2 = .94). For the other two groups, low correlations were found (Group 1: R2 = .12, Group 4: R2 = .10) (See Figures 1 & 2.) Little correlation was found for individual participants' scores. For example, despite the high group correlation found for group 2, much less association was evident when broken down by individual scores. (See Figures 3 & 4.)

For three of the four groups, no increases were found across the four time points. Only Group three showed (slight) concomitant increases in self-disclosure and group cohesiveness over time. (See Figures 1 & 2 for individual group trends.) For the total data set, developmental trends across the four time points were not seen. (See Figure 5.)

At the individual level, members appeared to experience identical events quite differently, as evidenced by their ideopathic responses to the open-ended critical incident question. No particular group events seemed to associate with concurrent increases or decreases in self-reported cohesiveness or self-disclosure. In addition, members' ratings often did not appear congruent with reported critical incidents. An example from each group follows:

In Group 1 (session 6), a member remarked that "people seemed supportive" in the group, and, as expected, rated the session as high in cohesiveness (C = 26). Another member perceived the same session as virtually lacking in cohesiveness (C = 7), complaining that "another member is not open and confronts me often."

In Group 2 (session 6), one member felt "ignored" and "hurt," subsequently self-disclosing very little (SD = 11); the same member rated the same session as moderately cohesive (C = 17). Another member was pleased with the topics, reported that s/he "felt better," and rated self-disclosure fairly high (SD = 20). Yet the latter member rated the same session as very low in cohesiveness (C = 9).

In Group 3 (session 4), one member "felt reprimanded and it tainted my attitude," but nonetheless rated the session as extremely high in cohesiveness (C = 28). None of the other members commented on (or perhaps noticed) this reprimand.

In Group 4 (session 8), one member felt hindered because "the topics were disjointed," and therefore rated the session as low in cohesiveness (C = 11). A second member felt hindered as well, but attributed this to "two interruptions." S/he nonetheless rated the session as extremely high in cohesiveness (C = 28). Meanwhile, a third member felt "at ease" because "people seemed more eager to self-disclose." Yet this individual rated the session as only moderately cohesive (C = 18), far lower than the preceding individual who felt hindered.

Discussion

Much of the literature on group research has posited definite stage theories of group

development. Others have linked specific events, i.e. increased self-disclosure and cohesion, as occurring together in lock-step fashion. Some have suggested these developmental phases as virtually axiomatic to the group process. Our results seem to indicate that, when taken as a whole, the data from the training groups appear not to have supported these assumptions. (See Figure 5.) Since cohesion and self-disclosure varied so little over time, we cannot necessarily attribute changes in either to reciprocal or developmental effects. Members seemed to have entered the groups feeling fairly cohesive and stayed at this level. Members self-disclosure began at a slightly lower level than cohesiveness, increased mildly during the fourth session, and then settled back to the original level by the 8th session.

This research examined a sample which, while common to training settings, has significant and systematic differences from what might be expected in other situations. These participants generally have no common focal problem as might be expected in other groups, which are organized for treatment, therapy, or specific informational purposes. The members of groups such as those studied here are usually previously acquainted, with varying degrees of prior familiarity, as members of a training cohort. These factors, as well as the typically very brief duration of these groups, may result in the development of group dynamics contrary to what would be expected from classic stage models of group development, and significantly different from what trainees could expect in running their first "real" groups.

The small training group is a ubiquitous teaching tool, and such experiences provide a useful, low risk introduction to group therapy as both members and leaders. In many programs, this experience is supplemented by an apprenticeship with a more experienced mentor, co-leading an "actual" group. In others it is not, and serves as the only experiential component in group leadership training. It would appear that these results call into question the wisdom of that practice. Just as the external validity of analogue research must be approached with some caution, perhaps it would be a good idea to view "analogue teaching" the same way. Our results suggest that it is probably wise to insist that leader-trainees subsequently experience a more typical sample of in vivo group development while under supervision as well.

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Figure 1

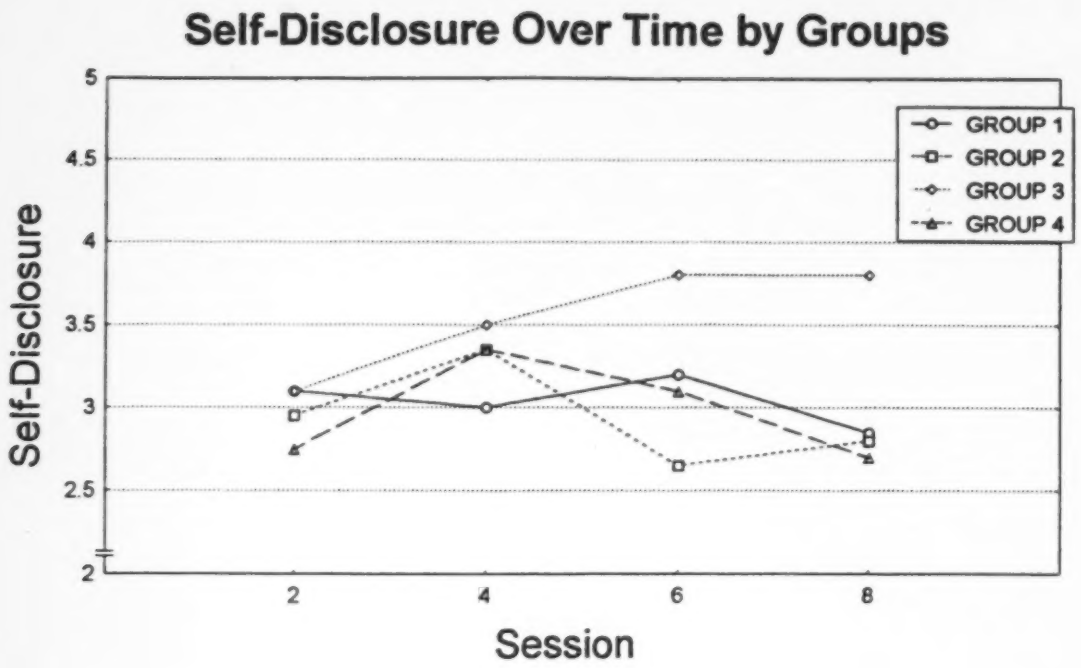
Self-Disclosure Over Time by Groups
Self-Disclosure
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
2
4
6
8
Session
GROUP 1
GROUP 2
GROUP 3
GROUP 4

Figure 2

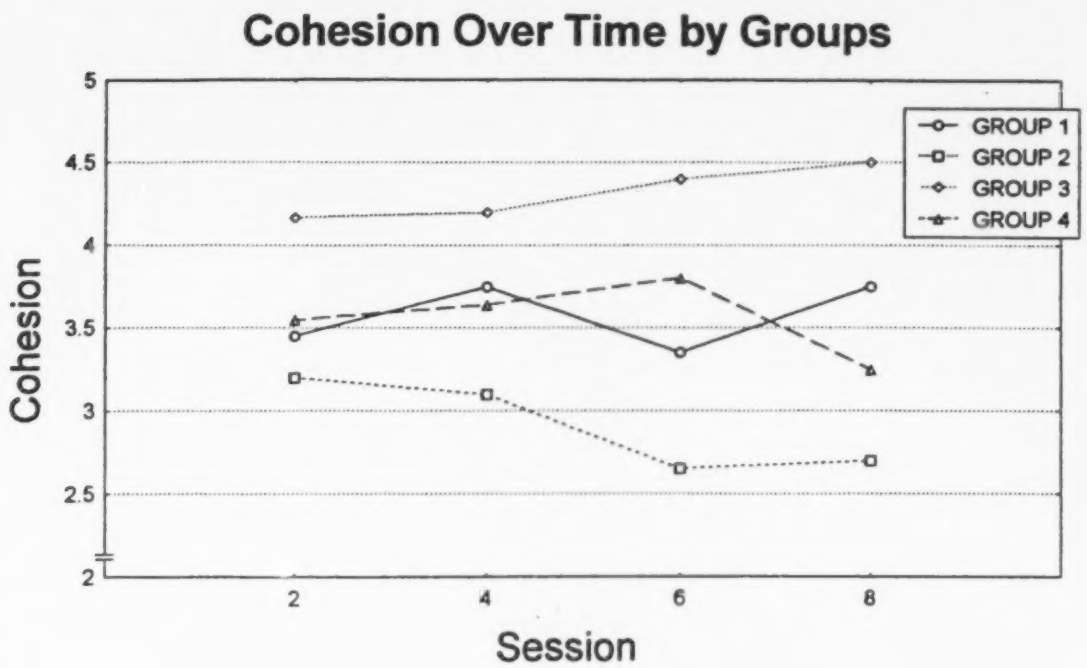
Cohesion Over Time by Groups
Cohesion
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
2
4
6
8
Session
GROUP 1
GROUP 2
GROUP 3
GROUP 4

Figure 3

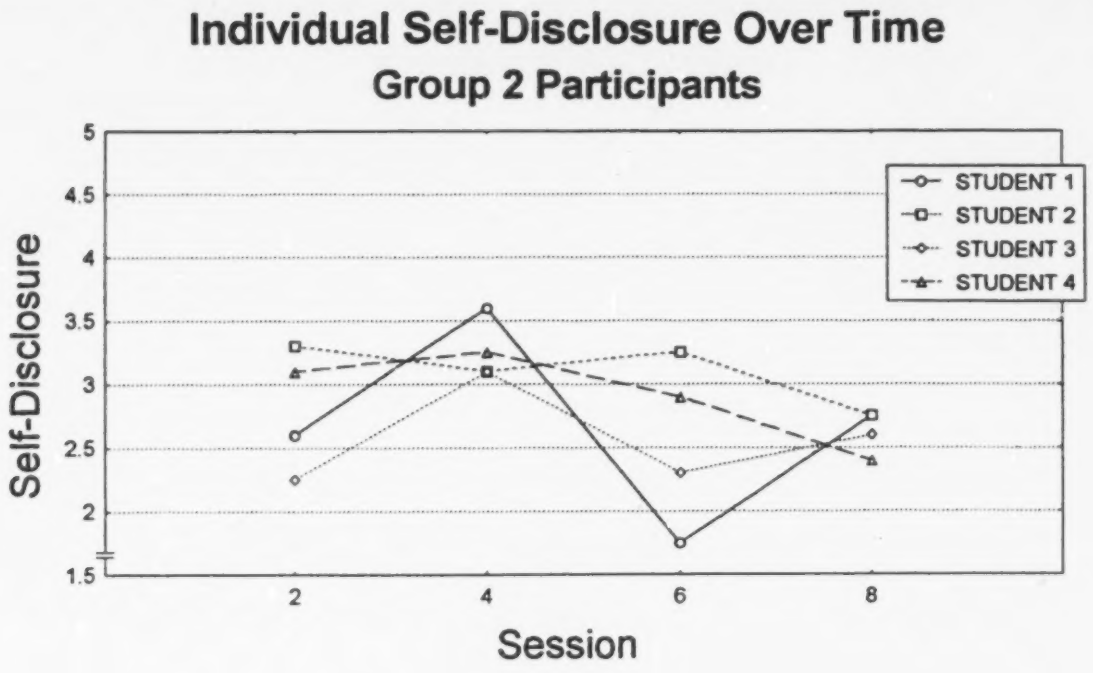
Individual Self-Disclosure Over Time
Group 2 Participants
Self-Disclosure
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
2
4
6
8
Session
STUDENT 1
STUDENT 2
STUDENT 3
STUDENT 4

Figure 4

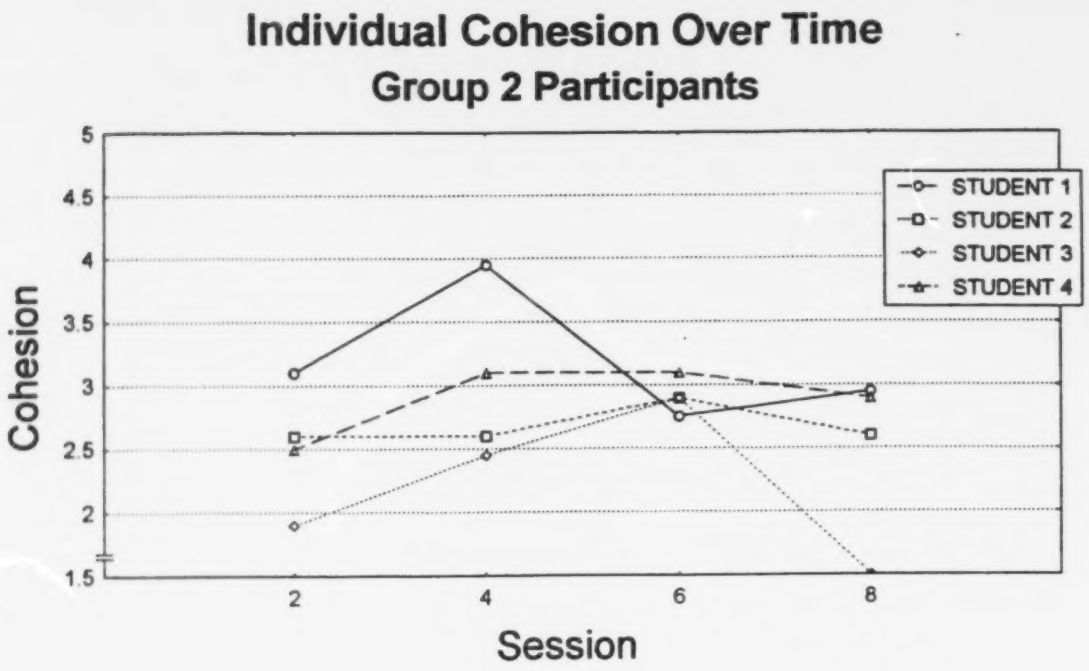
Individual Cohesion Over Time
Group 2 Participants
Cohesion
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
1.5
2
4
6
8
Session
STUDENT 1
STUDENT 2
STUDENT 3
STUDENT 4

Figure 5

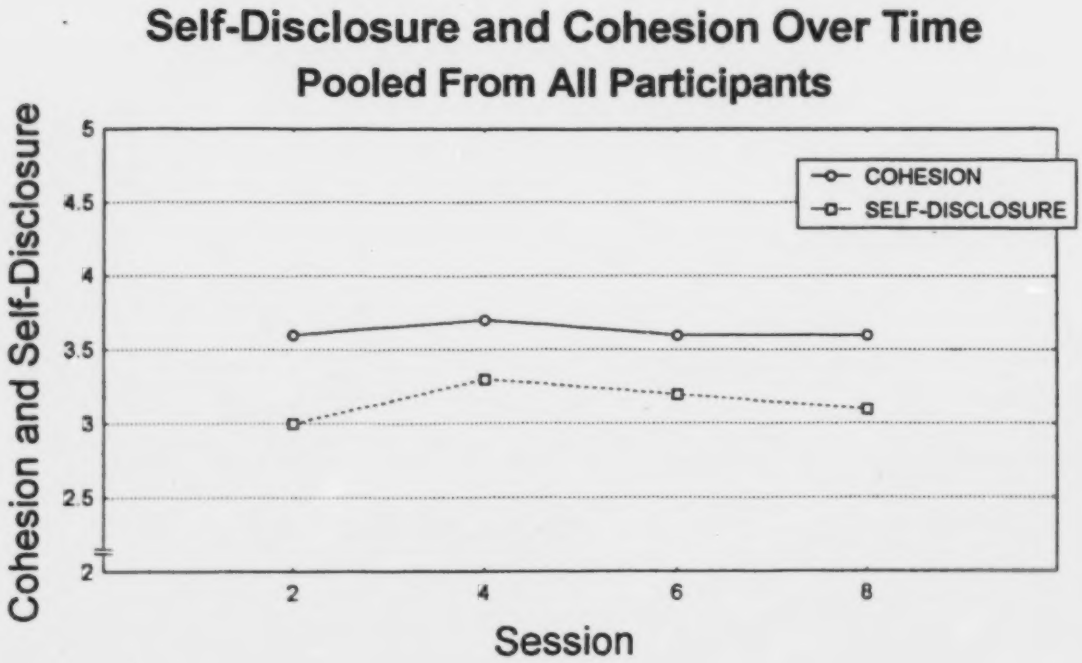
Self-Disclosure and Cohesion Over Time
Pooled From All Participants
Cohesion and Self-Disclosure
5
4.5
4
3.5
3
2.5
2
2
4
6
8
Session
COHESION
SELF-DISCLOSURE

Figure 6

Group Questionnaire

Individual Identification Number _ _ _ _ Date___/___/___

		Agree				Disagree
1.	I revealed a great deal about myself in the group.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I intentionally kept my feelings hidden from the group.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	The facilitators seem well qualified.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I would like the group to continue past the required number of sessions.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The group feels safe to me.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Compared to other groups, I imagine that my group works well together.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I would like to replace several group members.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I told the group something I had not planned to tell them.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I would pay to be in this group.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	When I talk, I usually discuss mundane matters in the group.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	I dread going to the group.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I feel that the group is supportive of me.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I feel uncomfortable talking about my personal issues with the group.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	The group facilitators are effective in making me feel like talking.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	The members of this group do not fit well together.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I have told the group things that I usually only tell close friends.	1	2	3	4	5

17. Was there something in the group today that helped or hindered you?

_____

_____

_____

_____(continue on reverse)